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ABSTRACT

Jobs and job satisfaction are the focus of this transcript of a radio series broadcast by the National Public Radio System entitled "Can You Get There from Here?" The second of a 4-part series on the relationship between schooling and jobs, this program centers around an interview with anthropologist Elliot Liebow, author of "Tally's Corner," and concentrates on Dr. Liebow's reactions to several sound portraits of people in what could be considered "dead end" jobs. The program also discusses unemployment and the problems of people who are not college-bound. (TA)

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Options in Education

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROGRAM TO BE BROADCAST
WEEK OF JANUARY 12, 1976

OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is an electronic weekly magazine devoted to coverage of news, features, policy and people in the field of education. This transcript focuses on a conversation between anthropologist Dr. Elliot Liebow, author of Tally's Corner, and OIE executive producer John Merrow. Reporter is Keith Talbot and host is Wendy Blair.

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This week's program is the second in a series of four programs on the relationship between schooling and jobs, "Can You Get There From Here?" This program, available for broadcast by National Public Radio's 181 member stations the week of January 12, concentrates on Dr. Liebow's reactions to several sound portraits of people in what could be considered "dead end" jobs.

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A full transcript is available as is a cassette at cost. Due to special funds from the Office of Career Education received for this mini-series, transcripts for the month of January are available at no cost and cassettes for all four programs are $12.00 (Single cassettes are priced at $4.00 each)

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CE 008 675

BLAIR: Options in Education is a news magazine about all the issues in education, from the abc's of pre-school to the alphabet soup of governmentment programs. I'm Wendy Blair. This week John Merrow and I continue a special four-part series on schooling and jobs, "Can You Get There From Here?"

LIEBOW: What it means to be unemployed; the kind of feelings that people have and walk around with or even when they are threatened with their jobs. To see smart secretaries, real smart gals, walk around who know that they are smarter than the guys they work for.

MERROW: That happens all the time.

LIEBOW: All the time, and it eats them up and they have to swallow it and live with it and you can smell it in them, their sense of frustration when they've got so much that they can do and they're kept from doing it.

BLAIR: That's anthropologist Elliot Liebow, author of "Tally's Corner," talking about the psychological impact of unemployment and underemployment. Last week we looked at the phenomenon of underemployment and talked with James O'Toole of the Center for the Study of the Future and author of "The Reserve Army of the Underemployed." O'Toole described the millions of Americans, mostly college-educated, whose expectations for meaningful work are frustrated in jobs which they see as dull and unchallenging. Their jobs, in short, are too small for their spirits.

MERROW: And the personal consequences of underemployment are felt off the job because work is perhaps the single most important human activity. If you don't feel good about your work it is hard to feel good about yourself. It's hard to recreate yourself in your leisure time. O'Toole also expressed a real concern that we have been overselling education in this country by promising young people better jobs and more money if they go to college. And 60 percent of last year's high school graduates went on to college -- but half of those won't graduate. So, we have a college-oriented public school system, even though only about 25 percent of our young people complete college. These 25 percent are candidates for underemployment. But what about the others, the students who are tracked into business or general education courses in high school?

BLAIR: They are likely to worry a lot more about unemployment. For example, unemployment among young Black males is over 50 percent in some cities. The book, "Tally's Corner" describes the lives of a dozen or so unemployed and underemployed Black men who spend most of their time at a carryout restaurant on a street corner. Dr. Elliot Liebow, who wrote "Tally's Corner," spent a year with these men in Washington, D. C., men like Tally, Sea Cat, Leroy, and Richard.

LIEBOW: Richard is 24 years old. He is about 5 foot 10, thin and muscular. Richard was born and raised in a small town in the Carolinas. He graduated from high school and married a girl who had lived across the street from him since childhood. In 1960, Richard had to leave his hometown suddenly in the middle of the night after assaulting, with provocation, according to his own and his family's account, a local, white policeman. His pregnant wife and their small son joined him in Washington a few days later. Richard worked primarily at janitorial jobs, but occasionally tried other kinds of jobs as well. In his first several months

in the carryout area, Richard built a reputation for himself as a hard-working man who tried to do his best for his family and as an all-around nice guy. But as time wore on things changed. Richard got into several fights. In one he killed a man. People grew afraid of Richard and began to avoid him. Richard dated his troubles from the killing, but they had in fact started long, long before. This is Richard talking to me while we were just standing around in the carryout shop. He was looking for work at the time. He said, "I graduated from high school, but I don't know anything. I'm dumb. Most of the time I don't even say I graduated because then somebody asks me a question and I can't answer it and they'd think I was lying about graduating. They graduated me, but I didn't know anything. I had lousy grades, but I guess they wanted to get rid of me. I was at Margaret's house the other night and her little sister asked me to help her with her homework. She showed me some fractions and I knew right away I couldn't do them. I was ashamed, so I told her I had to go to the bathroom."

MERROW: The line between unemployment and underemployment is a fuzzy one for the men of Tally's Corner. Existence is a struggle, dignity a luxury. But what about the next group up the ladder, people who have steady work as baggage handlers, clerks, waiters? From what perspective are these "dead end" jobs?

BLAIR: What you are going to hear is an experimental format. John asked Dr. Liebow to react to a group of sound portraits of people in their working situations, portraits constructed by reporter Keith Talbot. If it's true, as Freud has written, that "Work is man's strongest tie to reality," then our experiment should provide some insights into the relationship between people and their work. First John asks Elliot Liebow to define a "dead end" job.

LIEBOW: I think in a sense maybe all jobs are "dead end" jobs. But whether or not we treat them as "dead end" jobs, whether or not the society or the individual who has it characterizes it as a "dead end" job depends on whether or not that job is self-desirable or not.

MERROW: What makes it desirable? You seem to be saying a lot of it has to do with money.

LIEBOW: I think money is very important. Certainly, a job is the main way we have of making a living. It is the main way, the principal way, that most people have of providing themselves with food and shelter. It is the main way we have of staking a claim to some of the goods and services that are offered in the society. It is the main way of finding our place in the society. The job that we have to a large extent tells us how much social status we have, determines who our social relationships will be carried out with, often determines where we live, what kind of a house we'll live in, what kind of education we'll be able to provide for our children.

The job is more than a job. It is more than a way of making a living. It is more than a way of allocating statuses and prestige in our society. Now, increasingly, the job is also a source of leisure. It is from our job that we earn our vacations. The job is a source of health care. It is from our jobs that we get insurance -- some of us are fortunate enough to get health insurance coverage. It is from our jobs that we earn our retirement pay. Jobs have come to consume almost -- not consume -- have come to be providers for all of our needs, almost, from the cradle to the grave: vacation, health care, as well as making a living.

MERROW: So you shouldn't just say a job is a dead end job simply because there isn't room to advance up a great career ladder. That seems to be what you are saying. A teacher, for example, doesn't have a career ladder. You can make more money every year, but you can't really get out of the classroom unless you leave teaching altogether and become an administrator.

LIEBOW: She may not want to get out of the classroom. Perhaps the best teachers want to remain in the classroom. They get the kind of profound satisfactions from their job that tie them to the job and they would like to stay there. Why we should consider such a job a dead end job I don't know, unless it be the fact that these are jobs that people don't want to stay in. Primarily, I think most people don't want to stay in particular jobs because they can't earn enough to support themselves and their families. But in those jobs that do pay enough to support one's self and one's dependents, we don't normally consider them dead end jobs.

MERROW: What are the jobs that are dead end jobs? What identifies them as dead end jobs?

LIEBOW: Well, characteristically they are the jobs that people put at the very bottom of the job ladder. In the past it has been things like garbage collectors.

MERROW: It's not any more?

LIEBOW: Well, it's very hard to imagine a dead end job such as garbage collection which can attract, let's say if you announce, as the City of San Francisco did a couple of years back, announce, say, 100 openings and then 3,000 men show up the night before and camp outside in the school yard in order to be in the line for those jobs. It's hard to imagine those as being dead end jobs when they are so desperately wanted by somebody.

MERROW: Now, what took that out of the category of being a dead end job?

LIEBOW: Unionizing that job and bringing the wage level up to a living wage.

MERROW: So, it's money and benefits?

LIEBOW: And job security.

MERROW: So, even though it is a dirty job ---

LIEBOW: It didn't get any cleaner. But job security and a living wage lifted, I think, that category of job out of the -- well, lifted that job out of the category of dead end jobs.

MERROW: What are some of the dead end jobs that exist now?

LIEBOW: Well, I think trash and barbage collection are still dead end jobs where they are very low-paying jobs. Janitors are dead end jobs. Typically, I think, manual labor jobs which don't pay well are the ones that we characterize as dead end jobs. Now, let me qualify that. Not just manual jobs, I would guess that for some people being a low-paid bank teller or a low-paid clerk ---

MERROW: "For some people." Why do you make it "for some people"?

LIEBOW: Well, I think that some of us would be disinclined to characterize as a bad job or dead end job any white collar job. If you went, let's say, to a very low-income group of men and women whose only jobs had been in manual labor or domestic work and you asked them what they thought about a bank teller's job, they would automatically, I think, think that that is a fine job or at least a hell of a lot better than any they have access to themselves and would perhaps not characterize it as a dead end job. For them it might be desirable because it's clean, regular working hours, maybe job security.

MERROW: It's a dead-endedness, whatever the noun would be.

LIEBOW: It might well be a relative thing.

MERROW: What does that tell a person? Time and again in your writings you use these dramatic examples of people who work full time and make $3,000 a year, when the Bureau of Labor Standards says you need $9,000 to live a minimum level of comfort for a family of four. What's the symbolic message or the direct message to someone who works full time and makes $3,000 or $4,000 a year?

LIEBOW: I think the message is very clear. The message is that that person isn't needed. The message is that whatever it is, whatever contribution that that person is making to the rest of the community, it's simply not valued enough to enable him to support himself and his family and he is being told in effect that his contribution just isn't worth a damn.

MERROW: And I guess that's the phenomenon of underemployment that you mentioned.

LIEBOW: That's one piece, I think, of underemployment. Then there are a lot of people around -- some of the estimates run as high as 5 million, maybe I should say as low as 5 million -- of people who don't look for work, who have given up looking for work. They are not counted as unemployed any more. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, the official unemployment statistics, don't count people who are not actively seeking work as being unemployed. So the underemployed would include those who work full time and don't earn a living wage, would include those who have given up looking for work, would include those who work only part-time. Part-time workers are counted as employed people. The underemployed would include part-time workers who want to work full time but can't, as well as the traditionally counted unemployed.

MERROW: Which is eight point -- what is it -- eight point nine percent?

LIEBOW: Eight and a half to nine percent; eight percent.

MERROW: So what that adds up to is a staggering picture of the way we work in a society.

LIEBOW: It might end up, I have seen figures as high as 40 percent if you count underemployed, all the underemployed, meaning all involuntary part-time workers, people who have given up looking for jobs.

MERROW: I would like to run one of these tapes by you. I don't know what will happen. I have listened to it once and found it absolutely fascinating. This is the guy who works on a Greyhound Bus. I don't know if we are going to have a problem here. All the people you are about to hear are white. Your book, "Tally's Corner" is about Blacks and underemployment, unemployment and the social patterns that result among Black

people. Now, I don't know, are there real distinctions to be made?

LIEBOW: I think there's some distinctions to be made, but I think for purposes of this particular discussion, when we are talking about jobs and the importance of jobs for people, that we can disregard the color.

MURPHY: My name is James N. Murphy, and I work for the Greyhound Corporation as a baggage clerk. I thought a lot about it after coming out of high school, about maybe going into college or what have you, but I was uncertain, you know. I didn't have anything, you know, planned for sure. I more or less -- actually nothing for sure, you might say. I finished high school in 1955 and so I just, by luck, missed the Korean War. So, at the time, you know, jobs were fairly hard to find, making as much money as you made here at Greyhound. It was, you know, fairly good pay at the time. I thought that that was the thing. So, I grabbed it and first one thing led to another and before I knew it I had over 20 years, you know, hung up into this company.

You load, unload buses, check baggage. We have, you know, regular departure buses for New York and Philadelphia, and we more or less pull the stuff, the baggage, off the buses and freight off the buses and sort it and load it aboard the out-going schedules. You run into all kinds of weird people, you know, irritable people, you know. Something happens on -- maybe the bags get rerouted or something happens, somebody gives them a hard way to go, you know, somewhere along the line, and they, you know, want to take it out on us. You are more or less getting an education out there dealing with the public.

In a lot of other departments there's a lot more pressure on you and this and that and the other. I don't know, that's one reason why I like working outside, see, because, I don't know, it's not so much pressure on you as there would be maybe working as a ticket agent or working up in an office or something, see. I'm the type of person that never could be strapped to a desk, you know. Of course, I like to be on the go all the time, see, and you more or less know what you have to do and you go ahead and do it and that's it.

LIEBOW: What's very striking, you know, if you take what he says at face value, here's a guy working loading baggage onto buses, I would guess most people would say, "Gee, that's kind of a dead end job." They would not see that as much. And here's a guy that put 20 years of his life into it and seems reasonably content with his life, with the investment he has made in it. I think that it points up, in part anyway, this business of money. The first thing he grabbed at was a job that paid at what, to him, was a decent wage. He grabbed at it, he said. He grabbed at this job because of the money that it paid and he stuck to it. He stuck to it for 20 years. He said he doesn't even know where the time has gone. And there are some things about his job quite apart from the money that he seems to actively like and enjoy. He likes working outside. I suspect a part of that means that he's not under anybody's direct supervision, being told what to do all the time, and having somebody look over your shoulder. That kind of close supervision and almost spying seems to be one of the things that most people don't like about their jobs and here he's free of that.

MERROW: He said he didn't want to be a ticket seller.

LIEBOW: He's free of that. He sees what has to be done and he goes and does it. That is, he has got a responsibility and he takes some pride in the kinds of things that he does and the decisions that he makes. So

here's a job, I think a good example of what might normally be considered dead end, which is a perfectly, to him, a perfectly satisfying job, I think mainly because or in large part because he's able to live on it. It would be interesting to know whether he's able to support a family on his wage and whether he would mind if his son wanted to be a baggage clerk or whatever -- I'm not sure what he called himself.

MERROW: What would that tell you? Suppose he says, "This job is fine for me, but I wouldn't want my son to do it."

LIEBOW: It would be important to know why he wouldn't want his son to do it. I suspect that he might think that there are other ways and better ways of making a living, that there are other ways and better ways of gaining more attention from other people.

MERROW: But you can live with that without thinking poorly of yourself. I mean it seems to me that would be a normal human aspiration, to want your children to somehow do better than you do. And so I could say I want my kid to do more than I'm doing without necessarily thinking badly of myself for the things I do. Isn't that true?

LIEBOW: Yes, but asking what you expect of your children or would like your children to have is a little different than asking a man whether it would be okay for his child to end up as he ended up. I think that then he's for it. If you say, "Would it bother you if your son ended up doing this job," if he didn't think badly about the job himself, for himself, I think he would be inclined to say, "No; that would be all right, but I wish that ---" and I think here's a case of a man who seems relatively content with himself and the job that he has had for most of his working life.

And we shouldn't put him down for this. I think it's too easy for people on the outside, especially middle class people, to put such a man down for being content with making a living at what is generally considered a fairly menial, low-status job.

MERROW: So, you are saying that that is wrong.

LIEBOW: Well, I don't know about wrong. I think that what happens is that we look at a man like that and we find that his own contentment and satisfaction from such a job threatens the contentment and satisfaction we have from our jobs.

MERROW: How?

LIEBOW: Well, in a sense that he doesn't put any value at all, so far as we can tell, on climbing to the top.

MERROW: And we do?

LIEBOW: Well, very clearly, middle-class people -- well, let me change that from middle-class to career-oriented people, their satisfaction, their energies, are all directed at getting higher and higher. And here's a man that seems not to have taken that into account at all.

MERROW: He must be wrong.

LIEBOW: He must be wrong because if he is right we have wasted an awful lot of time, energy, effort, and perhaps education, and put it into the wrong basket.

MERROW: But your hypothesis is that he is able to speak as he does, with some contentment and some pride, he is able to explain his job to that reporter because it is not a dead end job and it is not a dead end job because there is enough money involved.

LIEBOW: He doesn't see it as a dead end job. He sees it as a job worth having.

BLAIR: Elliot Liebow, author of "Tally's Corner." In case you joined us late, let me explain that Dr. Liebow is listening and reacting to a series of sound portraits of people at work. Does school make a difference?

Well, I work for Avis Rent-A-Car. I'm a rental sales agent. I rent cars.

TALBOT: When you were in school, what did you think you were going to do during your life?

I was going to be a teacher. I was supposedly bright. But, you know how it is, you get married and then you don't go back to school and that's that.

I do waiter work.

TALBOT: When you were in school, what did you think that you were going to be when you grew up?

Nothing, just like what I am right now, nothing.

TALBOT: You had no idea?

Well, when I was coming up people didn't pay no mind no how. They just went on to work and forgot about all this other crap and let the rocks fall the way the come because that's the way it's going to be anyhow. You might think you can force it, but you can't force it.

I work for the American Telegraph and Telephone Company.

TALBOT: So, why are you here now, at night?

I'm a Special Relief Operator.

TALBOT: I see. When you were in school, what did you think that you were going to do when you grew up?

I'll tell you the truth, I just finished the 8th grade.

TALBOT: So you never had any help deciding what your career ---

No, I made my own way.

TALBOT: How do you feel about that?

I'm great.

TALBOT: Do you think your job is what's called a "dead end" job?

Oh, no, no. Anyone, any job that you might have, you can always advance. There's always advancement if you apply yourself.

TALBOT: Do you plan to advance further?

No. They want younger people today and the older people -- they don't seem to have as much place for the older people with the years of service with the company as the young people.

TALBOT: So, that's sort of a pressure on you?

That's right.

TALBOT: That's too bad.

So, therefore, I'm not even suspecting any advancements. I've reached my goal. I've accomplished what I started out to do, so I'm satisfied and I'm happy.

MERROW: A lot went by in those.

LIEBOW: Yes.

MERROW: There's a lot in there.

LIEBOW: There is a lot. But it's kind of difficult from a little picture now, I think, to sit back and, you know, for us to sit here and then try and analyze what lies behind, what kind of feelings lie behind the words that were expressed. But it is fun doing anyway, so we might as well go ahead and do it.

MERROW: Yeah, let's go ahead and do it.

LIEBOW: That last woman was very special. You could almost hear her pride in her voice and the satisfaction with herself. I think it was the last woman that said she was great.

MERROW: Yes, right, "I'm great." She's a telephone operator who's great.

LIEBOW: Her job wasn't a dead end job at all, she said. No job is a dead end job. But she then defined "no job is a dead end job" because you can always improve yourself. And yet when she was asked if she could advance she said no. I think we can let that go. I mean, it's very clear that she was satisfied with herself, her life. She said she was happy. She said she was great. She said she'd achieved her goal. I think that that goal, whatever it was, is the kind of goal that most of us share with her, what we want to do. The goal for most people, at least the goal, what they want of their working life, is to make a living, is to support themselves, to support their families by doing a job that someone else considers useful and is willing to pay them for doing.

MERROW: I heard her differently. Maybe that's inevitable, two different sets of ears, but that she said, "You can always advance. I'm great." I heard underneath that, undercutting that was her awareness that she wasn't able to advance and that she wanted to, but that she was being passed over -- not because of her 8th grade education or because of her talent -- but simply because of her age.

LIEBOW: Yes, I think she made that very clear. But what did you think she felt about that situation? She seemed to be saying -- unless we want to go way beyond her words and it's hard to do that -- she did say that she was satisfied and that she had reached her goal.

MERROW: I don't know. I guess I was conscious of the contradiction in what she said. Maybe we all live with contradictions and that she has them balanced. On the one hand, there's the social injustice of age being a factor in advancement, and on the other hand, and in contradiction to that, is her satisfaction with the fact that she has gotten to where she is and she does have job security. She does have the kind of job that offers her dignity. And she has balanced the contradictions.

LIEBOW: I don't know that it's a contradiction. I think we all have to -- as you said -- we all live with discontents of one kind or another. I think that what she said might parallel what that baggage loader might have been thinking, that yes, it would be nice, perhaps, if you had asked them, it would be nice to have another job, a better-paying job, a more prestigious job, but in the absence of that other job he was reasonably content with what he had. And in the case of this woman here, she, too, was saying she would like to have advanced. She's being passed over, she thinks, because of her age. And that's quite possible. But even after discounting the fact that she's being passed over because of her age, she's still relatively content with her job. I'm not sure that's a contradiction. She would like to have more, but she's satisfied with what she has.

MERROW: Fair enough.

LIEBOW. And I think that may be true of a great many of us.

MERROW: Dr. Liebow, what about the waiter, the guy who said in, it seemed to me -- well, the reporter said, "What did you expect to be" and he said, "Nothing, just what I am, nothing."

LIEBOW: And also it sounded as if he were the only Black person.

MERROW: He's not Black; he's white.

LIEBOW: Oh, he was white.

MERROW: Yes. And he said a very quotable line, "Just let the rocks fall where they may." Somehow that echoed for me what you were saying earlier about people who were born into that, who are living out their inheritance, if you will. Does it strike you that way?

LIEBOW: Very much so. Here's a man that seems to be saying that he expected nothing and he got nothing. So he's not disappointed. But he clearly feels put upon, the world has singled him out and gave him rocks. I'm not sure one could say that he's content. You know, because you get what you expect doesn't necessarily make for contentment. And he still sees himself as nothing.

MERROW: Nor does it mean you deserve what you get.

LIEBOW: Nor does it mean you deserve what you get. I think he said there "I'm nothing" when he was asked.

MERROW: Well, your analysis of the society would suggest that there are a lot of people for whom that is their inheritance. You know, that the way things are set up, that if you're poor, if you're parents are poor, if you're born into poverty, that's the hand you're going to be dealt.

LIEBOW: There was one other, the woman.

MERROW: At the beginning.

LIEBOW: At the beginning, who also came into her inheritance, too. She said she wanted to be a teacher, but she got married and had a family and "you know how it is." And that's a kind of inheritance, too, that people come into, that women come into. You may have career aspirations and job aspirations, but at the same time you know that everybody expects, and you yourself expect, that what you'll end up doing is getting married, having a family and staying home. And she had to forgo the business of being a teacher. She did, and ended up being a ticket agent for -- what was it?

MERROW: Avis Rent-A-Car.

LIEBOW: Avis Rent-A-Car. I don't know that she was discontent with that, except that it did sound as if she really would like to have been a teacher and that she had been identified as an especially bright kid in school. But here she'd been diverted by marriage and homemaking.

MERROW: Which is the fate of many women.

LIEBOW: Which is the fate of many women.

MERROW: They give up a career in order to act out their social role.

LIEBOW: And the inequity of it is that we very seldom, if ever, ask men to forgo their career aspirations or job aspirations and force them to become homekeepers and child rearers, but that women are expected to do that.

MERROW: I wonder if you can, maybe based on your year on Tally's Corner and also based on listening to the sound portraits, describe what school experience for those people might have been like. Is that possible to do?

LIEBOW: Not for me. I can't imagine.

MERROW: What about the people on Tally's Corner, Richard, Tally, Sea Cat, Leroy, what did they learn in school about working, about who they were? Did they ever talk about school?

LIEBOW: No. I think it is remarkable that they don't and didn't. Most of the men I knew, it might be fair to say that they were ashamed of talking about school and education because they had so little of it. And they kind of shied away, I think, from talking about it. School was not a rewarding experience, not an especially good one, especially as they got older. I suspect that early childhood years were good ones and school may have been fun, but as they go older, say in the 5th, 6th, 7th grade, why, it turned sour for them, as it does for most kids today, I think, in inner city schools.

MERROW: The usual analysis, I think, of schools, and particularly of -- well, of schools, is that they simply reinforce; they don't tell kids new things about themselves, they reinforce what they are being told from outside. And so kids who are problems outside, having problems of some sort, have the same problems in school. And it shouldn't be that way. Somehow schools ought to--for example, the grading system ought to distribute rewards a little more equitably. But what it does is, it tells

the same people year in and year out that they are A and B students and the same people year in and year out that they are D and F, or whatever the low end of the grading spectrum is, that they are the lousy students. And sooner or later they leave school because you can only take so much of that buffeting, being told that your're worthless. Maybe it's like the dead end job kind of thing. You know, if that's accurate, if schools are part of a cycle where, you know, you come into your inheritance, how would you break it? How would you change it?

LIEBOW: Well, I have one simple-minded answer and that is this business of guaranteed jobs. I think the way in which to break this cycle is to make the prospect of having a job and being able to support yourself and your dependents not only a possibility for everybody, but a guarantee and take that anxiety and that failure out of people's lives and make it possible for them to do that. And I think then you'll break all kinds of cycles. In effect, you'll break the poverty cycle. You'll break the cycle of female-headed families. You'll break -- well, I don't know, all the kinds of things that we associate, that tend to be associated with deep poverty in our cities.

MERROW: Of course, now the pattern is one of kind of blaming the victim, William Ryan's phrase that when you look upon someone who's a failure you, we, say that person is a failure and somehow he or she must have done something to deserve it; "if you're poor, it's your fault" kind of thing. And we have enough examples of people who pull themselves up by their bootstraps so that it -- what's the right expression -- it keeps that myth alive. As long as that's accurate you won't see any change at all.

LIEBOW: Well, I think it's relatively easy to disprove the myth. We can make pretty good guesses at the time the kid is born as to what his chances are at making it in the society. If you look at a welfare kid, a kid whose family is on welfare, his chances of making it are relatively slim. That's not to say that he may not, because of some very special talent that he might have or that she might have. You look at a middle class kid and his chances of making it are one hell of a lot better.

MERROW: You used that staggering example, absolutely staggering example of that child, a six-year old or eight-year old who's run over and killed and the insurance company comes to settle with the mother. I guess the child is Black. The mother was on welfare and the insurance company offers as compensation $600 or $800. What would happen in a white middle class family if the same thing happens?

LIEBOW: Well, my understanding is that these judgments are made on an actuarial basis. Some experts come along and they make predictions as to what the probabilities are for this individual's lifetime earnings. And we end up with a very low value, then, for kids on welfare because the probabilities are very small that they are going to do well.

MERROW: And for a white, middle class kid ---

LIEBOW: Obviously the chances are much better that he's going to do very well, so therefore his life in terms of dollars and cents is worth more and the compensation to the parents for the loss of that child is a lot greater. Now, that's the kind of thing, I think, that suggests strongly that the business of "anybody who wants to make it can make it" really is a myth. If you assume average intelligence and average effort, and most of us are average -- that's what "average" means -- if you assume average intelligence, average effort, the chances are that the kid on the bottom isn't going to make it anywhere as well as the kid that comes from a middle class family.

MERROW: I'd like you to listen to our last sound portrait of somebody who has made it describing how he made it.

FLYNN: My name is Kenneth Flynn. I live in Oxon Hill, Maryland. I'm currently working for Larry Yewell Realtors, who's licensed in Maryland. When I went into the Navy I was 22, from my college situation. When I finally got my degree I was 43, and I feel really good about that. Certainly, my education, after all those years, seems complete to me, and the tremendous sense of being whole, being competitive, you know, being one of the rest of the people. If you are looking for a nice, straight continuity of education, high school, college, whatnot, your're not going to find it from me unfortunately, I guess.

My family, my mother and father, were in export. And there are aspects about this discontinuity of schooling that I could say were, you know, really nice. I got to travel. I got to know people. I got to know a little foreign language. That's all well and good. But when it came to the hard realities of, you know, my making a living or my having a career, those social experiences really didn't help me one damn bit. One of the better things I did to education myself was to opt for a course by Dr. Stanley Hyman -- and I'm not sure which university sponsors him at this time, I think it is Georgetown, but I could be wrong -- he is becoming well known. But what he essentially tells a person seeking a job is that you must become like that person, that is, the person interviewing you. And he gives you lots of sight clues to use, such as, someone who smokes, you know, he is oral. Other things, is he clean, neat, aggressive? What you have to do is educate yourself enough, and he helps you that way, to see that person and become like him. If two people are basically alike, they naturally will have an affinity. So, therefore, interviewer likes interviewee and if he likes you well enough he takes you to the next guy. Well, you've got to watch it there because the next guy may be a totally different kind of individual and you have to kind of be like the second one without giving up the groundwork you've made with the first gent.

So, the breaks in education, my traveling, probably have made me more suited to that kind of, if you will, rapid adaptation than some other things I might have done. And the ultimate result is that today in my occupation I'm helping someone else. And in doing that I'm making a pretty decent living out of it. The neatest thing that happens is when you have a person that can barely afford to buy a home, yet you're able to find one for them and you know that they're happy and then have them move in and perhaps pay them a call or bring over a bucket of chicken, you know, the day they are moving in or something, soup, whatever -- if you've ever moved from a home you know what a hassle it is -- and actually see them smile and thank you. That's where the gratification comes in, "Well, if I can do it, I hope the next one is just as much fun for me as it is for them."

Excuse me, I'm going to have to pick this up. Good afternoon, Larry Yewell Realtors. May I help you? It's on the market at $47,500. Does that sound like something you're interested in? It sounds to me like the time to buy for you is right now. All right, if you want to call back in again, please, my name is Ken Flynn. Now if you call back, to help me out, can I have your name and phone number? Well, you wouldn't get a call; it just protects me. All right. Thank you very much. I appreciate your calling.

Walter, I'm doing worse than you are. Excuse me. No name, no phone. Those are the kind of calls that make you go wild. I kind of classify that one as a nosy neighbor kind of thing. He wants to find out what the neighborhood is going to do. But whenever we work our main objective is

number one, to lock the person down. That's the way we make a living. And you lock them down in this particular company by name and phone number. The whole object is to ask your question in a manner so that you are saying, "May I help you solve a problem? I'll need this kind of information." I've got to put myself in a position where I'm helping them. Because you are relying on the people out there. You're essentially a service person. Once you've gone through the machinations of finding homes and writing contracts, then you're servicing the people.

Okay. Well, that's the reason I called you, Mrs. McDowell, because I've got to give the owners of the home advance notice before coming back in the morning; give them a chance to make the beds and stuff. Can I meet you about 10 o'clock or 10:30? Would that be all right? What's convenient for you?

LIEBOW: Another thing that comes through here that I would like to harp on once more is the big deal he made out of making a decent living, you know, when he talked about, yes, he enjoys what he does and he makes a decent living. Making a decent living is absolutely crucial, I think, to any kind of job satisfaction. The other thing that is striking is the fact that here's a guy who's no doubt as good at selling himself as he is at selling a product. He's a salesman. He's proud of it and he's good at it and he makes a decent living.

I think he perhaps makes -- my guess would be that he's not properly assessing the importance of his early background, that he's not quite -- none of us is really as much of a self-made person as we'd like to think. And I don't think he is either. I think to the degree that he's made it he probably owes a lot more to his childhood experiences, to the traveling, to the broadening experiences that he says his parents' business gave him, than he's willing to attribute to it. And here's a guy who sounds like he is happy in his work.

Also, he makes a big point, too, of the fact that he's doing something for other people. I suspect strongly that's a very important ingredient of job satisfaction for most of us. We've got to be able to see at least in part that what we are doing has a direct effect and meets an immediate need of somebody else.

MERROW: Did you hear that in the Greyhound guy? Did you get a sense that he felt that what he was doing was somehow important?

LIEBOW: I don't think he put is as explicitly as this salesman did. But I suspect if you asked him about it, I think he would see it as something very valuable.

MERROW: If we have a need to see that, then that would certainly help us find it.

LIEBOW: I don't know about a need to see it, but I think that to be satisfied with what we do, we need to see it. There are a lot of people, I think, who probably are at jobs they feel are absolutely worthless or that they might even be harmful, and they keep on at the jobs. They don't like the idea of doing something that's not especially useful, but a job is a job. I think it would be interesting to know what, you know, a well-paid fireman on a diesel train thinks about his job, the featherbedding, what the impact is of carrying out what you know is a sinecur. You know that you have a job that isn't worth doing, that nobody needs and yet you are paid well to do it anyway. It would be interesting to look at the effects of that on that individual, on his relationships with his wife or her's with her husband, the relationships with their children, with their

friends, family, because I think it's very destructive.

MERROW: In terms of contempt for yourself for what your're doing?

LIEBOW: Yes. I think it's important to feel that you are making a useful contribution.

MERROW: Turn that around a little bit, with the real estate salesman, and the contribution to him, if you will, how he got to be what he is. You said you thought he made an error in discounting his own travel and all that sort of thing. I didn't hear him say anything at all about school except that one college course he took about how to size up people and be like them. Do you suppose what happens to people in schools has a great impact on people and the kind of jobs they end up in?

LIEBOW: Well, clearly it does for professional people. You know, there are some jobs that require certification and you can only get that through formal education, in order to be a doctor or a lawyer or what have you. For working-class people generally, I don't think that it seems to make that much difference.

BLAIR: Elliot Liebow, author and anthropologist, talking about jobs and job satisfaction. He leaves us with an important question, John, about just what role schools play in sorting young people into different jobs.

MERROW: Earlier he used the phrase, "coming into your inheritance" to describe the men of Tally's Corner and the woman who wanted to be a teacher but quit school to raise a family. According to his analysis, the United States is a class society and the accident of birth largely determines how and where we end up. For the last decade, in the War on Poverty and the programs of the Great Society, schools have been used to try to prevent disadvantaged children from coming into their inheritance of a life of poverty, ignorance and indignity. There is a great debate raging right now about whether all those special school programs are making much difference.

BLAIR: It seemed to me that James O'Toole, on our first program in this series, and now Elliot Liebow, have different solutions to the problem we're looking at. O'Toole says we have to redesign many of the jobs so that they show respect for the people performing them, and he says we have to stop selling education as a guaranteed ticket to more money and a prestigious job. Education is worth it in it's own right, he stresses. Elliot Liebow, on the other hand, would like to guarantee employment, at a fair wage, to anyone who wants to work, and he'd guarantee that the jobs really need to be done.

MERROW: I find myself remembering what Dr. Liebow wrote about work. "The job of lathe operator, assembly line workers truck driver, the secretary, these tend to be dead end jobs, too, but they are not bad jobs because of it. Not everyone in our society is career-oriented. We have a large and relatively stable working class population which does not aspire to moving up a career ladder. The working man who earns a living and supports his family by doing work that everyone agrees is socially useful does not necessarily want to become a foreman or plant manager or office executive. If he is dissatisfied, it's probably because he wants more of what he has and wants to be more certain of keeping what he has, not because he wants to be something different."

BLAIR: There is some interesting research data that agrees with Liebow. Project Talent, a research project studying the aptitudes and careers of over 400,000 Americans, has found that 11 years after high school 80 percent of those studied describe their jobs as rewarding.

Only 8 percent wish they'd gone into another line of work. It's a carefully-drawn sample, which means that the results can be interpreted to represent all high school juniors and seniors in 1960. Half of those students went on to college, and half of that half actually graduated from college.

MERROW: The college dropout rate, 50 percent, is the same, but today 60 percent of the high school graduates go on to college. According to Project Talent, which is funded by the National Institute of Education, the biggest regrets of the group are that they married when they did, that they did not take more training after high school, and that they didn't go on to college. Half the group called high school either valuable or fairly useful. The other half, however, said that for them "high school was adequate at best."

BLAIR: John, I know you want to say something about schooling and jobs, but before you do, I'd like to repeat the question we asked last week. We are getting letters everyday, and we will report the results in Part Four of this series. Here's our question: When you were in school, did you plan or train for the job you now hold? We'll give you an address in a minute. John?

MERROW: Wendy, we're calling this series "Schooling and Jobs," but I'm struck by how little time we have spent talking about what happens in school. It's clear that school and labor are related. For one thing, it was only as child labor became unnecessary or undesirable that high schools came into existence. School has become society's instrument for preparing its children for life, for adult responsibilities. But whether what goes on in school has much relationship to the world outside is a very real question. The reward structure of schools is designed to encourage more and more schooling. That automatically deals a lot of young people a bad hand. For many young people high school is simply a holding pattern. For others, it represents intense competition to get on the next rung of the education ladder. And for the rest it is a consistent reminder that they are of little value.

BLAIR: Our series on Schooling and Jobs continues next week. Do send us your answer to our question, "When you were in school, did you plan or train for the job you now hold?"

MERROW: Send your answer to Options in Education, 2025 M Street, Northwest, Washington, D. C., 20036. This four-part series is made possible with funds provided by the Office of Career Education of the U. S. Office of Education.

BLAIR: Their grant also allows us to distribute transcripts of the four-part series free of charge, instead of the usual 25 cents each. If you would like a set -- and only one set per person, please -- write us. If you have already sent us some money, we'll send it back. Cassettes are available, too, at $12 for the four-part Schooling and Jobs series. Here's the address again: Options in Education, 2025 M Street, Northwest, Washington, D. C., 20036.

This program is produced my Midge Hart. The executive producer of Options in Education is John Merrow. I'm Wendy Blair.

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